

**WILLITS BYPASS**  
**MENDOCINO COUNTY**  
**KP R69.4/KP 84.2 (PM R43.1/52.3) [EA26200]**

**DRAFT**  
**ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT /**  
**ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT**

United States Department of Transportation  
Federal Highway Administration



California Department of Transportation



**VOLUME 1 OF 2**  
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A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jeff Morales".

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Report Number:

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01-Men-101, KP R69.4/84.2 (PM R43.1/52.3)  
262000

Construction and Operation of a Freeway Bypass  
on US 101 around the City of Willits in Mendocino County, California  
from KP R69.4 to KP 84.2 (PM R43.1/52.3)

DRAFT  
ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT/ ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT

Submitted Pursuant to:

National Environmental Policy Act, 42 U.S.C 4332 (2)(c) and the  
California Environmental Quality Act, Div. 13, Public Resources Code  
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and the State of California Department of Transportation

Cooperating Agencies

California Transportation Commission, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Environmental Protection  
Agency, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Marine Fisheries Service

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**ABSTRACT:** The California Department of Transportation and the Federal Highway Administration propose to construct a new segment of U.S. 101 that would bypass the City of Willits in Mendocino County. Four build alternatives are under active consideration. Three of these alternatives would construct a new freeway segment east of Willits; the fourth alternative would construct a new freeway segment west of Willits. The alternatives vary in length from 9.0 kilometers (5.6 miles) to 14.8 kilometers (9.2 miles). A no build alternative is also under consideration. Mitigation measures are proposed to reduce impacts to various resources, such as biological resources, including wetlands; visual and cultural resources; farmland; business and residential relocations; minority and low-income residents; and hazardous materials.

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# Table of Contents: Volume 1

(Volume 2, Environmental Atlas, bound separately)

Summary .....	S-1
<b>CHAPTER 1</b> Introduction .....	1-1
1.1 CEQA and NEPA .....	1-1
1.2 Purpose of this Draft EIR/EIS .....	1-1
1.3 Project Decision Making .....	1-4
1.4 Organization of the Draft EIR/EIS .....	1-4
1.5 Nodal Analysis .....	1-6
1.6 Metric System .....	1-7
1.7 Comments Requested .....	1-7
1.8 Public Hearing .....	1-7
1.9 Availability of Draft EIR/EIS and Technical Studies .....	1-7
<b>CHAPTER 2</b> Purpose and Need for Project .....	2-1
2.1 Purpose of Proposed Bypass Project .....	2-1
2.2 Need for Proposed Bypass Project .....	2-2
2.2.1 Existing Facility .....	2-3
2.2.2 Level of Service for Interregional Traffic .....	2-5
2.2.3 Safety Concerns .....	2-7
2.2.4 Interregional Truck Traffic Interferes with Local Travel .....	2-8
2.2.5 Noise and Vibration .....	2-8
2.2.6 Conditions for Bicyclists and Pedestrians .....	2-8
2.3 Objectives of the Proposed Action .....	2-9
2.4 History of Planning and Scoping Process .....	2-10
2.4.1 Pre-1987 History .....	2-10
2.4.2 Post-1987 History .....	2-10
2.5 Funding and Schedule .....	2-12
2.6 Support For The Project .....	2-13
<b>CHAPTER 3</b> Description of the Proposed Action and its Alternatives .....	3-1
3.1 Introduction .....	3-1
3.2 Evaluating Alternatives by Segment .....	3-1
3.3 Common Features of Alternatives C1T, E3, J1T, and LT .....	3-2
3.3.1 Design Exceptions .....	3-6
3.3.2 Estimated Cut and Fill Requirements – Designated Borrow Site .....	3-6
3.3.3 Relinquishment of Bypassed Portions of Existing U.S. 101 .....	3-8
3.4 Description of Alternatives Under Consideration .....	3-9
3.4.1 Alternative C1T .....	3-10
3.4.2 Alternative E3 .....	3-12
3.4.3 Alternative J1T .....	3-13
3.4.4 Alternative LT .....	3-15
3.4.5 No-Build Alternative .....	3-16
3.5 Comparison of Alternatives .....	3-18
3.5.1 Safety .....	3-18
3.5.2 Level of Service .....	3-20
3.6 Alternatives Considered But Eliminated From Further Study .....	3-26
3.6.1 Alternative TSM .....	3-31
3.6.2 Two-Lane Alternative .....	3-33

3.6.3 Modal Choice Decision .....	3-34
<b>CHAPTER 4 Affected Environment .....</b>	<b>4-1</b>
4.1 Topography and Climate .....	4-1
4.2 Geology .....	4-1
4.2.1 Regional Geology .....	4-1
4.2.2 Soils .....	4-2
4.2.3 Seismic Activity .....	4-3
4.2.4 Landslides .....	4-4
4.2.5 Mineral Resources .....	4-4
4.3 Land Use .....	4-5
4.3.1 Land Use Regulation .....	4-5
4.3.2 Existing Land Use .....	4-6
4.4 Farmlands .....	4-10
4.4.1 California Land Conservation (Williamson Act) .....	4-11
4.5 Social Characteristics .....	4-12
4.5.1 Environmental Justice .....	4-12
4.5.2 Demographics .....	4-13
4.5.3 Housing Characteristics .....	4-15
4.5.4 Employment and Income Characteristics .....	4-17
4.6 Economics .....	4-18
4.6.1 Existing Economic Setting .....	4-18
4.7 Water Resources .....	4-21
4.7.1 Surface Water Hydrology .....	4-21
4.7.2 Groundwater Hydrology .....	4-22
4.7.3 Regional Water Quality .....	4-23
4.8 Floodplain Encroachment .....	4-23
4.9 Biological Resources .....	4-25
4.9.1 Natural Communities .....	4-25
4.9.2 Threatened And Endangered Species And Species Of Concern .....	4-27
4.9.3 Invasive Plant Species .....	4-41
4.9.4 Wetlands and Other Waters of the United States .....	4-42
4.10 Historic and Archaeological Resources .....	4-42
4.10.1 Ethnography and Archaeology .....	4-42
4.10.2 History .....	4-44
4.10.3 Study Area and Surveys .....	4-46
4.11 Hazardous Waste .....	4-48
4.11.1 Potential Hazardous Waste Sites .....	4-48
4.11.2 Hazardous Waste Spills – U.S. 101 .....	4-50
4.12 Visual Resources .....	4-51
4.12.1 South Valley Landscape Assessment Unit .....	4-51
4.12.2 Miracle Mile Landscape Assessment Unit .....	4-52
4.12.3 Historic District Landscape Assessment Unit .....	4-52
4.12.4 Brooktrails Landscape Assessment Unit .....	4-53
4.12.5 Little Lake Valley Landscape Assessment Unit .....	4-53
4.13 Noise .....	4-53
4.13.1 Existing Noise Sensitive Land Uses .....	4-53
4.14 Air Quality .....	4-54
4.15 Section 4(f) Resources .....	4-55
<b>CHAPTER 5 Environmental Consequences .....</b>	<b>5-1</b>
5.1 Geology and Soils .....	5-1
5.1.1 Method of Analysis .....	5-1

5.1.2	Impact Thresholds.....	5-2
5.1.3	Mitigation Measures .....	5-2
5.1.4	Impact Analysis .....	5-3
5.2	Community Impacts.....	5-6
5.2.1	Regulatory Setting .....	5-6
5.2.2	Impact Thresholds.....	5-7
5.2.3	Method of Analysis.....	5-8
5.2.4	Mitigation Measures .....	5-9
5.2.5	Impact Analysis .....	5-10
5.3	Community Facilities and Services Impacts.....	5-21
5.3.1	Impact Thresholds.....	5-21
5.3.2	Public Facilities.....	5-22
5.3.3	Public Services.....	5-24
5.4	Land Use and Local Planning Impacts .....	5-25
5.4.1	Impact Thresholds.....	5-25
5.4.2	Farmland .....	5-26
5.4.3	Method of Analysis.....	5-27
5.4.4	Farmland Impact Thresholds .....	5-28
5.4.5	Mitigation Measures .....	5-29
5.4.6	Impact Analysis .....	5-30
5.5	Water Quality.....	5-32
5.5.1	Regulatory setting .....	5-32
5.5.2	Water Quality Assessment.....	5-39
5.5.3	Method of Analysis.....	5-39
5.5.4	Impact Thresholds.....	5-40
5.5.5	Mitigation Measures .....	5-41
5.5.6	Impact Analysis .....	5-42
5.6	Floodplain Impacts.....	5-48
5.6.1	Regulatory Setting .....	5-48
5.6.2	Method of Analysis.....	5-49
5.6.3	Impact Thresholds.....	5-50
5.6.4	Mitigation Measures .....	5-50
5.6.5	Impact Analysis .....	5-51
5.7	Biological Resources .....	5-58
5.7.1	Regulatory Setting .....	5-59
5.7.2	Methods .....	5-62
5.7.3	Impact Thresholds.....	5-64
5.7.4	Mitigation Measures .....	5-65
5.8	Cultural Resources.....	5-100
5.8.1	Regulatory Setting .....	5-101
5.8.2	Method of Analysis.....	5-102
5.8.3	Impact Thresholds.....	5-102
5.8.4	Mitigation Measures .....	5-103
5.8.5	Impact Analysis .....	5-103
5.9	Hazardous Materials .....	5-106
5.9.1	Regulatory Setting .....	5-106
5.9.2	Method of Analysis.....	5-107
5.9.3	Impact Thresholds.....	5-107
5.9.4	Mitigation Measures .....	5-107
5.9.5	Impact Analysis .....	5-109
5.10	Visual Resources.....	5-114



5.10.1	Regulatory Setting .....	5-115
5.10.2	Method of Analysis .....	5-115
5.10.3	Impact Thresholds .....	5-116
5.10.4	Mitigation Measures .....	5-116
5.10.5	Impact Analysis .....	5-117
5.11	Noise .....	5-137
5.11.1	Regulatory Setting .....	5-137
5.11.2	Impacts Thresholds .....	5-139
5.11.3	Method of Analysis .....	5-139
5.11.4	Impact Analysis .....	5-140
5.12	Air Quality .....	5-148
5.12.1	Regulatory Setting .....	5-148
5.12.2	Method of Analysis .....	5-149
5.12.3	Impact Thresholds .....	5-149
5.12.4	Mitigation Measures .....	5-150
5.12.5	Impact Analysis .....	5-150
5.13	Energy .....	5-152
5.13.1	Regulatory Setting .....	5-152
5.13.2	Method of Analysis .....	5-152
5.13.3	Impact Thresholds .....	5-153
5.13.4	Impact Analysis .....	5-153
5.14	Section 4(f) Resources .....	5-156
5.15	SMARA Compliance .....	5-160
5.16	CEQA Summary Table of Impacts and Mitigation Measures .....	5-161
<b>CHAPTER 6</b>	<b>Other Statutory Requirements .....</b>	<b>6-1</b>
6.1	Growth Inducement .....	6-1
6.1.1	Regulatory Framework .....	6-1
6.1.2	Growth Inducement Analysis .....	6-1
6.1.3	Factors .....	6-2
6.2	Cumulative Impacts Analysis .....	6-9
6.2.1	Regulatory Framework .....	6-9
6.2.2	Cumulative Impacts Analysis .....	6-10
6.2.3	Biological Resources .....	6-13
6.2.4	Hydrology and Water Quality .....	6-16
6.2.5	Prime Farmland .....	6-17
6.3	Irreversible Environmental Impacts .....	6-18
6.4	Environmental Effects That Cannot Be Avoided If The Project Is Implemented .....	6-18
6.5	Relationship Between Short-term Uses of the Environment and the Maintenance and Enhancement of Long-term Productivity .....	6-20
<b>CHAPTER 7</b>	<b>Permits Required For This Project .....</b>	<b>7-1</b>
<b>CHAPTER 8</b>	<b>Contributors and Reviewers .....</b>	<b>8-1</b>
<b>CHAPTER 9</b>	<b>Current Distribution List .....</b>	<b>9-1</b>
<b>CHAPTER 10</b>	<b>Comments and Coordination .....</b>	<b>10-1</b>
10.1	Responsible Agencies .....	10-1
10.2	Trustee Agency .....	10-1
10.3	Coordination with Agencies .....	10-2
10.4	Notice of Preparation and Notice of Intent .....	10-2
10.5	Public Outreach .....	10-3
<b>Appendix A</b>	<b>Glossary and Index .....</b>	
<b>Appendix B</b>	<b>Bibliography .....</b>	

<b>Appendix C</b>	Biological Resources Mitigation Measures
<b>Appendix D</b>	Notice of Preparation Distribution List
<b>Appendix E</b>	Responses to NOP/NOI
<b>Appendix F</b>	Corps of Engineers Wetlands Delineation
<b>Appendix G</b>	NEPA/404 Memorandum of Understanding and Interagency Coordination..
<b>Appendix H</b>	NEPA/404 Alternatives Analysis
<b>Appendix I</b>	Section 106 SHPO Concurrence
<b>Appendix J</b>	Relocation Assistance Advisory Service
<b>Appendix K</b>	Willits Bypass Newsletters
<b>Appendix L</b>	Farmland Conversion Impact Rating Form And Williamson Act Contract Lands Summary of Impacts
<b>Appendix M</b>	Noise Impact Summary
<b>Appendix N</b>	4(F) Joint Development Planning Documentation
<b>Appendix O</b>	USFWS Species List
<b>Appendix P</b>	Recommendation Matrix And Criteria For Comparing Alternatives
<b>Appendix Q</b>	Revised Truck Scales Interchange (Alternative C1T)



## List of Figures

Figure S-1. Project Location .....	S-3
Figure S-2. Project Alternatives and Nodal Locations .....	S-4
Figure S-3. Alternatives That Have Been Studied and Eliminated.....	S-5
Figure 1-1. Project Location .....	1-2
Figure 2-1. Existing U.S. 101 in Willits .....	2-4
Figure 3-2. Typical Cross-Sections: Side Slopes.....	3-4
Figure 3-3. Typical Cross-section: Ramps, Local Roads, and Private Access Roads .....	3-5
Figure 3-4. Average Speed on U.S. 101 .....	3-21
Figure 3-5. Average Travel Time on U.S. 101 .....	3-21
Figure 3-6. Total Peak Hour Delay.....	3-25
Figure 4-1. Willits General Plan Land Use Diagram.....	4-9
Figure 4-2. Census Tract Block Groups 107.1, 107.5, and 107.6.....	4-15
Figure 4-3. Skunk Train Depot in Willits .....	4-46
Figure 5-1 Summary of Impacts to Biological Resources Prior to Mitigation .....	5-74
Figure 5-2. Summary of Impacts to Biological Resources after Mitigation .....	5-75
Figure 5-3. Impacts to Plant Communities, Including Sensitive Plant Communities (in acres) .....	5-76
Figure 5-4. Impacts to Sensitive Plant Communities.....	5-77
Figure 5-5. Jurisdictional Waters of the U.S./Wetlands (in acres).....	5-85
Figure 5-6. Upper Haehl Creek Interchange.....	5-120
Figure 5-7. Proposed Condition Upper Haehl Creek Separation.....	5-121
Figure 5-8. Proposed Condition Viewshed N Alternative E3.....	5-125
Figure 5-9. Proposed Condition Viewshed L, Alternative E3 .....	5-127
Figure 5-10. Proposed Condition Viewshed H, Alternative J1T .....	5-132
Figure 5-11. Proposed Condition Viewshed F, Alternative J1T .....	5-134
Figure 5-12. Photosimulation.....	5-136
Figure 5-13. Evaluated Soundwall Location.....	5-144
Figure 5-14. Willits Long-Range Park Facilities.....	5-159
Figure 6-1. Past, Present, and Reasonably Foreseeable Future Projects.....	6-11

## List of Tables

Table S-1. Comparison of Alternatives .....	S-11
Table 1-1. Location of Required CEQA/NEPA Components in the Willits Bypass EIR/EIS ...	1-3
Table 2-1. Freeway Level of Service (LOS) Criteria .....	2-2
Table 2-2. Travel Time on U.S. 101 (KP 69.4/84.2) for Interregional Traffic.....	2-6
Table 2-3. Estimated Project Cost.....	2-13
Table 3-1. Alternatives Summary.....	3-10
Table 3-2. Statewide Average Number of Collisions Over a Five-Year Period Using 2028 AADTs .....	3-19
Table 3-3. Statewide Average Number of Fatal Plus Injury Collisions Five-Year Period Using 2028 AADTs.....	3-19
Table 3-4. Traffic Volumes on U.S. 101 .....	3-26
Table 3-5. Alternatives Considered But Eliminated from Further Study .....	3-29
Table 4-1. Summary of General Soil Characteristics .....	4-3
Table 4-2. Seismic Activity .....	4-4
Table 4-3. Existing Land Use in the City of Willits .....	4-6
Table 4-4. Mendocino County Summary by Land Use Category .....	4-10
Table 4-5. Mendocino County Acreage Enrolled in Williamson Act Program.....	4-12
Table 4-6. Willits Area Population .....	4-13
Table 4-7. Housing Characteristics .....	4-16
Table 4-8. Willits/Trade Area Population .....	4-18
Table 4-9. Taxable Transactions in Willits .....	4-19
Table 4-10. Count and Classification of Businesses Along U.S. 101 Through Willits.....	4-20
Table 4-11. Concentration of Businesses Along U.S. 101 by Location and Type .....	4-21
Table 4-12. Drainage Area and 100-Year Peak Discharge .....	4-24
Table 4-13. Habitat Areas on the Floor of Little Lake Valley.....	4-26
Table 4-14. Plant Communities in the Willits Bypass Project Area .....	4-26
Table 4-15. Special-Status Plants Known or Having Potential to Occur in the U.S. 101/Willits Bypass Study Area .....	4-30
Table 4-16. Special-Status Wildlife Species Known or Having Potential to Occur in the U.S. 101/Willits Bypass Study Area .....	4-32
Table 4-17. Special-Status Fish Species Known or Having Potential to Occur in the U.S. 101/Willits Bypass Study Area .....	4-39
Table 4-18. List of California Department of Food and Agriculture Noxious Weeds for the Willits Bypass Project .....	4-41
Table 4-19. Hazardous Waste Spills and Potential Hazardous Waste Properties .....	4-49
Table 4-20. Historical Air Pollution Data for the City of Willits.....	4-55
Table 4-21. Park and Recreation Facilities That Could Be Affected by the Project .....	4-56
Table 5-1. Summary of Major Geotechnical Variables for Each Alternative .....	5-4
Table 5-2. Residential Acquisitions by Type of Unit.....	5-11
Table 5-3. Acquisitions of Residences from Low-Income/Minority Population .....	5-13
Table 5-4. Affordable Housing Displacements as a Percentage of Total.....	5-16
Table 5-5. Impact on Taxable Sales (Millions of Dollars).....	5-18
Table 5-6. Estimated Property Tax Reductions as Proportions of Local Agency Revenues.....	5-19
Table 5-7. Farmland Conversion by Alternative.....	5-30
Table 5-8. Prime Farmlands Impact Summary, by Segment.....	5-31
Table 5-9. Summary of Impacts to Williamson Act Parcels .....	5-32

Table 5-10. General Water Quality Objectives for Surface Waters Within the North Coastal Basin .....	5-36
Table 5-11. Specific Water Quality Objectives for Eel River and Outlet Creek .....	5-38
Table 5-12. Water Quality Objectives for Inorganic Chemicals.....	5-39
Table 5-13. Existing and Potential Beneficial Uses for Surface Waters.....	5-40
Table 5-14. Flood Insurance Rate Map Designations.....	5-49
Table 5-15. Areas of Floodplain Encroachment .....	5-52
Table 5-16. Plant Community and Sensitive Plant Community Impact Summary [Values in ha (ac)] .....	5-78
Table 5-17. Special-Status Plant Impact Summary.....	5-83
Table 5-18. Jurisdictional Waters of the U.S./Wetlands [Values in ha (ac)] .....	5-87
Table 5-19. Archaeological Sites by North and South Segments (W = Within; A = Adjacent) .....	5-104
Table 5-20. Hazardous Waste Spills and Potential Hazardous Waste Properties.....	5-111
Table 5-21. Visual Quality of Viewsheds With and Without the Project.....	5-118
Table 5-22. Activity Categories and Noise Abatement Criteria (NAC) .....	5-138
Table 5-23. Vehicle Mix Percentages .....	5-140
Table 5-24. Data For Determining Reasonableness.....	5-143
Table 5-25. Locations of Predicted Substantial Noise Increase.....	5-145
Table 5-26. Construction Equipment Noise Ranges .....	5-148
Table 5-27. Projected Direct Energy Consumption by Alternative: 2010 - 2015.....	5-154
Table 5-28. Projected Indirect Energy Consumption by Alternative: 2010 - 2015 .....	5-154
Table 5-29. Projected Direct Energy Efficiency by Alternative: 2010 -2015.....	5-155
Table 5-30. Noise Impact Summary .....	5-157
Table 5-31. Summary of Environmental Impacts And Mitigation Measures.....	5-162
Table 6-1. 1990 - 2000 Property Sales Data (Dollar Value/Sq Ft) .....	6-3
Table 6-2. Average Value of Farmland and Buildings per Acre (1997).....	6-3
Table 6-3. Labor Supply Characteristics for Willits and Surrounding Areas .....	6-6
Table H-3-1. Wetland/Waters of U.S. in the U.S. 101/Willits Bypass Project Area.....	H-6
Table H-3-2. Habitat Areas on the Floor of Little Lake Valley.....	H-6
Table H-3-3. Special-Status Plants Identified as Potentially Occurring in the U.S. 101/Willits Bypass Study Area.....	H-15
Table H-3-4. Special-Status Wildlife Species Known or Having Potential.....	H-17
to Occur in the U.S. 101/Willits Bypass Study Area .....	H-17
Table H-3-5. Special Status Fish Species Known or Having Potential to Occur in the U.S. 101/Willits Bypass Study Area .....	H-21
Table H-5-1. Direct Impacts to Jurisdictional Waters of the U.S./Wetlands .....	H-26
Table H-5-2. Special-Status Plant Nodal Impact Summary.....	H-29
Table H-5-3. Willits Bypass Major Creek Corridor Roadway Impact Assessment Summary: Fisheries Resources.....	H-36
Table H-5-4. Willits Bypass Section 404 (b)(1) Alternatives Analysis Matrix .....	H-42
Table M-1. Predicted Traffic Noise Impacts .....	M-2
Table M-2. Summary of Impacts and Feasibility of Sound wall Abatement.....	M-9

# Summary

## S.1 Introduction

The following summary focuses on major areas of importance to decision-makers regarding the proposed project. The reader will find additional pertinent information regarding the project, such as detailed project description, in the body of the report.

This Draft Environmental Impact Report (EIR) / Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) contains two volumes. Volume 1 consists of ten chapters, following this summary, and the Technical Appendices. Maps are included separately in Volume 2, Environmental Atlas. To read this Draft EIR/EIS, readers should have Volume 2. Readers may wish to review Chapter 1 Introduction, which describes the purpose of this document and how to use it.

## S.2 Summary of Proposed Action And Its Alternatives

The project area is located in the City of Willits (Willits) in Mendocino County (Figure S-1). The project is being proposed to reduce delays, improve safety, and achieve a "C" Level of Service (LOS -- a qualitative means of describing traffic conditions, Table 2-1) for interregional traffic. To address these operational problems due to the current facility being used as both an interregional through route and a local main street, the project proposes construction of a new segment of U.S. 101 that would bypass Willits (Figure S-2). The Willits Bypass project has been programmed for \$116 million for capital improvements in the 2002 State Transportation Improvement Plan. Start of construction is scheduled for 2005. The Mendocino Council of Governments included its entire \$17.3 million share of 1998 Regional Improvement Program funds for the project. Estimated capital costs for the build alternatives are Alternative C1T-- \$128 million; Alternative E3 -- \$301 million; Alternative J1T -- \$151 million; and Alternative LT -- \$130 million. Additional state and regional funds will be the source of the balance of funds needed to construct the project.

Approximately thirty bypass alternatives have been considered during the project's history (Figure S-3). The earliest alternative, referred to as Alternative A, was formally adopted by the California Transportation Commission (CTC) in 1963, prior to federal and state environmental laws. It involved building a new freeway segment across the Little Lake Valley and was essentially a straight line that was the shortest

possible route between the beginning and ending points for the bypass. This alternative was dropped eventually because of its adverse environmental impacts. Since then, other alternatives have been considered as a result of public and governmental agency input and independent investigation by Caltrans staff.

This Draft EIR/EIS presents four build alternatives to implementing the proposed project. Four of the alternatives (C1T, E3, J1T, and LT) would construct a four-lane freeway bypassing the Willits. Alternatives C1T, J1T, and LT would cross the Little Lake Valley east of Willits. Alternative E3 would traverse the hills west of Willits (Figure S-2).

In addition, a No-Build Alternative is being considered. Under, the No-Build Alternative, traffic would continue to travel on existing U.S. 101 on the same facility motorists now use.

The Willits Bypass Project Development Team (PDT) divided each alternative into smaller sections for evaluation purposes. This “nodal approach” also allows for combining sections of different alternatives, thus providing greater flexibility in identifying a preferred alternative (Section 1.5 Nodal Analysis). Most of the text and tables in this document display data in a manner that allows environmental impacts of each segment to be evaluated separately.

Chapter 3 of this document describes in detail each alternative under consideration and the alternatives that were considered but eliminated because they were determined to be infeasible or not “practicable.”

## Figure S-1. Project Location

**Figure S-2. Project Alternatives and Nodal Locations**



**Figure S-3. Alternatives That Have Been Studied and Eliminated**

### **S.3 Summary of Possible Controversial Issues**

CEQA Guidelines (Sec. 15123) and NEPA Regulations (40 C.F.R. 1502.12) require the summary to identify areas of controversy known to the lead agency including issues raised by other agencies and the public.

#### **S.3.1 Two-Lane Bypass**

FHWA regulations do not allow development of a facility that would be functionally obsolete within its design life. In 1992, Caltrans staff studied a two-lane bypass of Willits and determined that a two-lane bypass would not achieve a satisfactory level of service or improve safety. In 2000, after all technical studies were completed for the current range of alternatives, the Willits Environmental Center (WEC)<sup>1</sup> asked Caltrans to reconsider a two-lane alternative for the proposed bypass project. In response, Caltrans analyzed the concept but chose not to add a two-lane alternative because, foremost, a two-lane alternative would not meet the "purpose and need" for the project. The "purpose and need" calls for a facility that would provide a LOS "C" through the 20-year design period (i.e., 2028). A two-lane facility would provide a LOS "D" at peak hour upon construction (2008), and would diminish to LOS "E" within the 20-year period.<sup>2</sup> LOS "E" exists when a facility is at capacity during peak traffic flows. Thus, a new two-lane highway would be functionally obsolete within the design period. This issue is discussed in detail in Section 3.6.2.

#### **S.3.2 Wetlands and Other Waters of the U.S.**

Wetlands are distributed widely in the Little Lake Valley east of U.S. 101. Any of the valley alternatives (C1T, J1T, and LT) would result in the loss of a portion of these wetlands, with Alternative C1T having the greatest impacts. Alternative C1T would impact 52.3 ha (129.1 ac) of wetland habitat that qualifies as waters of the United States (U.S.). Impacts to wetlands and other waters of the U.S. are discussed in detailed in Section 5.7.4.6.

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<sup>1</sup> The Willits Environmental Center (previously Willits Citizens for a Safe Environment) has been a member of the project's Technical Advisory Group since 1990.

<sup>2</sup> It is important to recognize that LOS of "C" on a 4-lane freeway is substantially different than LOS "C" on a 2-lane highway, in that a freeway offers continuous passing opportunities. On a 2-lane road, passing opportunities are affected by volume and sight distance. Average operating speeds are directly affected by slower traffic.

Permanent impacts to waters of the U.S., due to loss of these wetlands, would be:

- Alternative C1T: 30.0 ha (74.2 ac) north segment and 22.3 ha (55.1 ac) south segment for a total of 52.3 ha (129.1 ac)
- Alternative E3: 1.0 ha (2.5 ac) north segment and 5.1 ha (12.6 ac) south segment for a total of 6.1 ha (15.1 ac)
- Alternatives J1T: 11.6 ha (28.9 ac) north segment and 9.5 ha (23.5 ac) south segment for a total of 21.1 ha (52.4 ac)
- Alternative LT: 11.3 ha (28.1 ac) north segment and 18.1 ha (44.7 ac) south segment for a total of 29.4 ha (72.8 ac)

### **S.3.3 Special-Status Plants**

Two special-status plant species would be impacted by the build alternatives: Baker's meadowfoam and glandular western flax. Impacts include the direct loss of habitat that supports special-status species; direct loss of individual special-status plants; and indirect impacts. Indirect impacts could include project-related activities near habitats that support special-status species that could subsequently reduce habitat quality for those species. Direct and indirect impacts to special-status plants would be:

- Alternative C1T: 33,700 Baker's meadowfoam plants (north segment); 10,300 Baker's meadowfoam plants (south segment)
- Alternative E3: one population (less than 100 plants) of glandular western flax
- Alternatives J1T: 33,200 Baker's meadowfoam plants (north segment); 2,000 Baker's meadowfoam plants (south segment)
- Alternative LT: 33,200 Baker's meadowfoam plants (north segment)

### **S.3.4 Wildlife, Including Special-Status Species**

All of the alternatives could impact riparian birds (including yellow warbler, yellow-breasted chat, and little willow flycatcher), raptors (including northern harrier, Cooper's hawk, white-tailed kite, and golden eagle), northwestern pond turtle, and foothill yellow-legged frog. In addition, Alternative E3 and the designated borrow site could impact Northern spotted owl and red tree vole.

Impacts include the direct loss of habitat that supports special-status species; direct loss of individual special-status species; and indirect impacts. Indirect impacts could

include project-related activities near habitats that support special-status species that could subsequently reduce habitat quality for those species.

### **S.3.5 Special-Status Fish Impacts**

Three special-status fish, which use project area streams for migration, spawning, and rearing, would be affected potentially by all the alternatives: coho salmon (*Oncorhynchus kisutch*), fall-run chinook salmon (*oncorhynchus tshawytscha*), and steelhead (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*).

Alternative C1T would have the greatest impacts to fisheries, followed by Alternative E3. Alternatives J1T and LT would have the least impacts to fisheries. Alternative C1T would require the realignment of three creeks: 275 m (900 ft) of upper Haehl Creek (south segment of Alternative C1T); 400 m (1,300 ft) of Mill Creek and 1,600 m (5,250 ft) of Outlet Creek (north segment of Alternative C1T).

Alternatives J1T and LT (south segments) would require the realignment of 275 m (900 ft) of upper Haehl Creek.

Alternative E3 would create the greatest impacts of potential erosion relative to the other alternatives. The proposed alternative would directly impact or degrade 3.6 ha (8.9 ac) of riparian habitat, most of which is along Haehl Creek, due to channel realignment. Impacts to wildlife, including special-status species, in the project area are discussed in Sections 5.7.4.7 and 5.7.4.8. Impacts to special-status fish are discussed separately in Section 5.7.4.9.

### **S.3.6 Farmland Impacts**

Alternative E3 would exceed the Farmland Protection and Policy Act 160-point threshold in its conversion of Prime and Unique Farmland to other uses and would result in the largest conversion of agricultural land (288 ha/713 ac) of the other build alternatives. However, Alternatives C1T, J1T and LT would come close to exceeding the 160-point threshold in their conversion of Prime and Unique Farmland. The greatest impact to agricultural lands would be at the southern segments of all of the build alternatives. Section 5.4.2 discusses impacts to farmlands in the project area.

### **S.3.7 Community Impacts**

Alternative E3 would require 114 residential relocations. Alternative J1T (south) would require the relocation of the three businesses in the city's recently constructed industrial park. Alternative J1T (south) would also require relocating an automobile dismantling business, the six mini-storage units associated with this business, and a portion of a large local trucking company. Section 5.2 discusses impacts to community resources.

## **S.4 Issues To Be Resolved**

This DEIR/EIS does not identify a "preferred" alternative. Based on the information provided in this document, as well as oral and written comments from the public and governmental agencies, Caltrans and FHWA will identify preferred alternatives and select one for implementation. The preferred alternative that is selected for implementation will be identified in the Final EIR/EIS.

## **S.5 Least Environmentally Damaging Practicable Alternative (NEPA) and Environmentally Superior Alternative (CEQA)**

Because of impacts to wetlands and other waters of the U.S. that are subject to U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE) jurisdiction, project sponsors must evaluate all practicable alternatives that avoid or would have less adverse impacts to aquatic resources (Clean Water Act, Section 404 (b)(1) Guidelines, Alternatives Analysis). The Section 404(b)(1) Alternatives Analysis is a specific evaluation to determine the Least Environmentally Damaging Practicable Alternative (LEDPA) to wetlands and other waters of the U.S., including wetlands, while meeting the project's purpose. ACOE will issue a Section 404 Permit only for the LEDPA.

The California Environmental Quality Act [Guidelines Sec. 15126(d)] requires EIRs to identify the environmentally superior alternative from the range of reasonable alternatives being evaluated. If the environmentally superior alternative is the No-Build Alternative, the EIR "shall also identify an environmentally superior alternative among the other alternatives." The LEDPA would be considered the environmental superior alternative for CEQA purposes.

The Section 404 analysis of the build and no-build alternatives for this project concluded that Alternatives E3 and C1T do not meet the LEDPA as required under

the Guidelines because of unavoidable and unacceptable environmental consequences and/or because of excessive costs. The No-Build Alternative, while being the least environmentally damaging alternative, does not meet the purpose and need of the project.

The two remaining alternatives, J1T and LT, would have similar impacts at the Quail Meadows Interchange where both Alternatives J1T and LT converge. Alternative J1T has lesser wetland impacts than Alternative LT in the southern segment. The analysis concluded that either Alternative LT or J1T meets Guidelines criteria for the LEDPA, because these alternatives meet the project's purpose and need and have moderate wetland impacts with lesser environmental consequences to other resources (e.g., community, cultural resources, fisheries).

Following the public comment period and input from the resource and regulatory agencies, the NEPA preferred alternative/Section 404 LEDPA will be disclosed in the Final EIS. If a build alternative is selected, project features will be refined for additional minimization of impacts and avoidance of resources within the project limits. In addition, a detailed compensatory mitigation plan will be finalized and approved by the resource agencies for all unavoidable impacts to aquatic resources based on the agreed upon preferred alternative. The Section 404 Alternatives Analysis is included herein as Appendix H.

## **S.6 Irreversible Commitment of Natural Resources**

The proposed project would not result in an irreversible commitment of resources (i.e., fossil fuels, fiscal resources, land use, labor, etc.). Considerable amounts of fossil fuels and highway construction materials such as cement and aggregate would be expended in construction of the proposed project. Additionally, a large amount of labor and natural resources are used in the fabrication and preparation of construction materials. These materials are generally not retrievable. However, they are not in short supply and their use would not have an adverse effect upon their continued availability. Construction of the project also would require a substantial one-time expenditure of both state and federal funds that are not retrievable. The commitment of these resources will benefit the region, the state, and the residents of the immediate area with an improved transportation system. Benefits consist of improved safety and savings in time and fuel, which are anticipated to outweigh the commitment of the resources being used.

## S.7 Adverse Environmental Effects that Cannot be Avoided if the Project is Implemented

An EIS must discuss the environmental impacts of the proposed action and its alternatives including any adverse environmental effects which cannot be avoided should the proposal be implemented (40 CFR 1502.16). The CEQA requirement is comparable in that an EIR must include a description of those impacts identified as significant and unavoidable if the proposed project were constructed [CEQA Guidelines, Section 15126.2(b)]. A project results in unavoidable impacts if mitigation is not effective in reducing the impact or if no mitigation or only partial mitigation is feasible. Table S-1 illustrates impacts, by alternative, that cannot be avoided if the project is implemented.

**Table S-1. Comparison of Alternatives**

X= With mitigation, impact remains O= With mitigation, impact reduced or minimized	C1T	E3	J1T	LT
Landsliding and other Seismic Impacts	O	X	O	O
Relocation Impacts	O	X	O	O
Impacts to Minority or Low-Income Populations (Environmental Justice)	O	O	O	O
Water Quality	X	X	O	O
Sensitive Plant Communities	O	X	O	O
Waters of the U.S.	X	O	O	O
Special Status Wildlife	O	X	O	O
Special Status Fish Species	X	X	O	O
Potential Hazardous Waste Properties	O	O	X	O

### S.7.1 Landsliding and other Seismic Impacts

- Alternative E3: Even with special design mitigation, the *potential for landslides* would remain high for this alternative.

### S.7.2 Relocation and Environmental Justice Impacts

- Alternative E3 would require 114 *residential displacements*.
- Alternative E3: Alternative E3 would result in the relocation of low-income residents. However, last resort housing payments and other relocation benefits constitute off-setting benefits that will reduce impacts to affected low-income residents.



### **S.7.3 Water Quality and Special Status Fish Species**

- Alternatives C1T (north segment): Because of realignment of over 2,000 m (6,500 ft) of Mill Creek and Outlet Creek, and removal of riparian vegetation along some channel reaches, Alternative C1T would result in adverse impacts to *fish migratory patterns and habitat quality*, including *water temperature*.
- Alternative E3: Potential for impacts to *fish populations and suitable salmonid habitat* (including *water temperature*) resulting from erosion is greatest with Alternative E3. Also would require several stream crossings and would impact 3.6 ha (8.9 ac) of riparian habitat primarily along Haehl Creek, due to channel realignment.

### **S.7.4 Sensitive Plant Species**

- Alternative E3: Would impact 32.8 ha (81 ac) of *sensitive plant communities*. The loss of 22.7 ha (56.1 ac) of oak woodlands, in particular, would be adverse, because of the length of time required for oak trees to grow into stands of mature trees that provide wildlife habitat.

### **S.7.5 Waters of the U.S.**

- Alternative C1T: Would impact 52.3 ha (129.1 ac) *wetlands and other waters of the U.S.* The north segment would also require the realignment of approximately 400 m (1,300 ft) of Mill Creek and 1,600 m (5,250 ft) of Outlet Creek.

### **S.7.6 Special Status Wildlife Species**

- Alternative E3: Direct and indirect impact to intermittent streams resulting from culvert construction on the smaller drainages within this alignment would have impacts to *foothill yellow-legged frogs* and their habitats.
- Alternative E3: This alternative's impacts are unavoidable because of the magnitude of impacts and the difficulty of reestablishing mid- and old-growth forested habitat that provide optimal habitat for *Northern spotted owl* and *red tree vole*.

### **S.7.7 Hazardous Waste Sites**

- Alternative J1T: There is an unknown risk related to hazardous waste clean-up costs because four *potential hazardous waste properties* are located along its alignment.

## **S.8 Summary of Federal Actions Required for this Project**

### **S.8.1 NEPA/404 MOU Integration Process**

A Section 404 Individual Permit will be required from ACOE for impacts on wetlands and waters of the U.S. The ACOE issues the permit; however, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) has oversight and override authority of this permit.

Concurrence has been obtained on the project's purpose and need, modal choice, range of alternatives and criteria for choosing an alternative by the signatories of the NEPA/404 Memorandum of Understanding (MOU): ACOE, USEPA, National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), and Caltrans. Concurrence also was received from the California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG). Although CDFG is not a signatory agency in the NEPA/404 MOU, Caltrans and FHWA invited them to participate early in the process.

An alternatives analysis (Appendix H) is being conducted in accordance with the Section 404(b)(1) Guidelines and the NEPA/404 Integration Process. The Section 404(b)(1) Alternatives Analysis is a specific evaluation to determine the Least Environmentally Damaging Practicable Alternative (LEDPA) to waters of the U.S., including wetlands, while meeting the project's purpose. This information would be used to obtain the Individual Permit from ACOE.

In coordination with public circulation of the Draft EIR/EIS, ACOE issues a Section 404 public notice of the Draft EIR/EIS. FHWA and Caltrans evaluate the Draft EIR/EIS comments received, and ACOE evaluates comments received on the Section 404 public notice. Following comments received on the Draft EIR/EIS and the Section 404 public notice, Caltrans/FHWA, ACOE and USEPA are required to concur with the NEPA-preferred/Section 404 LEDPA, which will be documented in the Final EIR/EIS for final approval. Written agreement that the preferred alternative is the LEDPA would be required from ACOE and USEPA. Agreement that the project mitigation plan and implementation schedule is adequate would be required after circulation of the Draft EIR/EIS, as well.

After circulation of the Draft EIR/EIS and identification of the LEDPA, a preliminary agreement with USFWS on project mitigation would be required. A "Non-Jeopardy" Biological Opinion pursuant to the Endangered Species Act (federal) also would be

required from USFWS at that time. After Final EIR/EIS approval, the document is circulated and ACOE issues a Section 404 public notice of the proposed Individual Permit.

The following documents will be included in the Final EIR/EIS as a preliminary agreement of Section 404(b)(1) compliance:

- Written USFWS preliminary agreement in the project mitigation plan as a result of earlier Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act consultation,
- Written USFWS/NMFS Non-Jeopardy documentation,
- Section 401 certification from State Water Quality Control Board, and
- Written ACOE and USEPA preliminary agreement on the following:
  - The final EIS NEPA preferred/Section 404 LEDPA,
  - That the project will not significantly degrade the aquatic environment, and
  - That the project mitigation plan and implementation schedule is adequate.

### **S.8.2 Section 7 Endangered Species Act**

FHWA and Caltrans currently are engaged in informal consultation with USFWS and NMFS under Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act. FHWA and Caltrans continue to meet with agency staff to discuss their concerns and mitigation approaches. When a preferred alternative is selected, after public circulation of the Draft EIR/EIS, formal consultation will begin. At this time also, Biological Assessments on Northern spotted owl, coho salmon, Northern California steelhead, and California coastal chinook salmon will be prepared, which will identify impacts of the selected project alternative and proposed mitigation for each affected species.

### **Filing, Notices and Record of Decision**

This Draft EIR/EIS has been filed with USEPA and a notice published in the Federal Register. After the 60-day public review of the Draft EIR/EIS and selection of a preferred alternative (explained above under Section S.8.1 NEPA/404 MOU Integration Process), Caltrans/FHWA will prepare the Final EIR/EIS after comments on the draft are received and reviewed. Caltrans/FHWA will file the Final EIR/EIS with USEPA, a notice will be published in the Federal Register, and the Final EIR/EIS will be available for a 30-day public review. At the end of the public review period, Caltrans/FHWA may adopt the EIS and will prepare a Record of Decision

(ROD), describing the reasons a specific alternative was chosen. The ROD will be made available to the public through public notice.

## **S.9 Revised Truck Scales Interchange (Alternative C1T)**

In April of 2002, the Willits project design team developed revisions to the originally proposed Truck Scales Interchange for Alternative C1T. The original Truck Scales Interchange is shown on Map 25b in Volume 2. These revisions were made in response to critiques of the original proposal, as a result of Caltrans design exception approval process. The following interchange design changes are proposed: shift the mainline alignment easterly at the farthest point approximately 85 m (280 ft), change the interchange type to a diamond, and lengthen the connection to existing U.S. 101 at the north end by approximately 430 m (1400 ft) to complete the lane reduction. The revised interchange is shown on Map 25b(2) in Volume 2. Caltrans Headquarters and FHWA have approved the modified interchange concept proposed by the Caltrans Design team. The revised interchange improves operation and motorist safety.

Caltrans has studied the differences in environmental impact between the two interchanges and concluded that there would be a minimal change in area impacted by the revised interchange design. A table showing the differences in impact between the two interchanges is included in Appendix Q. The revised interchange design would result in approximately 0.43 ha (1.06 ac) increase in impact to jurisdictional wetlands and other waters of the U.S. Alternative C1T, with the former interchange design, impacted a total of 52.3 ha (129.1 ac). With the revised interchange the total would be 52.73 ha (130.16 ac). Caltrans has notified its NEPA/404 resource agency partners and California Department of Fish and Game of the revised interchange design and the differences in environmental impacts between the old and revised interchange designs (letter dated May 1, 2002, Appendix Q).

# CHAPTER 1 Introduction

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To assist readers in using this document, this section discusses basic format and organization of the document and the environmental process.

## 1.1 CEQA and NEPA

When a project involving state and/or federal funds or discretionary actions could have an adverse impact on the environment, the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) require the preparation of an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) and/or an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), respectively. Adherence to both laws is required for the proposed Willits Bypass Project because the project could have an adverse impact on the environment, and decisions on the project must be made by both the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) and Federal Highway Administration (FHWA).

Although CEQA and NEPA are similar in their purpose, they are different in their specific requirements. To streamline these processes a single Draft EIR/EIS has been prepared, which addresses the requirements of both laws. Caltrans and FHWA are the "lead agencies" responsible for implementing these laws, as they are the public agencies responsible for initiating and carrying out the proposed project. FHWA has the responsibility to monitor the project for compliance with federal environmental laws, review the draft and final EIR/EIS for legal adequacy, and document how decisions on the project were made. Additional information about the environmental and decision-making processes is discussed below.

## 1.2 Purpose of this Draft EIR/EIS

Caltrans and FHWA prepared this Draft EIR/EIS to provide an objective evaluation of the environmental and community impacts associated with construction and operation of a proposed bypass that would re-route U.S. 101 off the main street of Willits. Figure 1-1 shows the location of the proposed Willits Bypass Project. As its name implies, a bypass is a road that takes through-traffic around an area of concern. Chapter 2, Purpose and Need for Project, describes why a bypass is being proposed.

## Figure 1-1. Project Location

CEQA and NEPA require that each EIR and EIS, respectively, include specific components. Table 1-1 shows the content required by each law and where in the EIR/EIS each component can be found.

**Table 1-1. Location of Required CEQA/NEPA Components in the Willits Bypass EIR/EIS**

<b>Required CEQA components</b>	<b>Location</b>
Table of Contents (Guidelines Sec. 15122)	Table of contents
Summary (Guidelines Sec. 15123)	Summary
Project Description (Guidelines Sec. 15124)	Chapters 2 and 3
Environmental Setting (Guidelines Sec.15125)	Chapter 4
Environmental Impacts (Guidelines Secs.15126, 15064(f))	Chapter 5 and Table 5-31
Alternatives (Guidelines Sec. 15126.6)	Chapter 3
Mitigation Measures (Guidelines Sec. 15126.4(a))	Chapter 5 and Table 5-31
Growth-inducing Impacts (Guidelines Sec. 15126.2(d))	Chapter 6
Cumulative Impacts (Guidelines Sec. 15130)	Chapter 6
<b>Required NEPA components</b>	<b>Location</b>
Cover Sheet (40 CFR 1502.11)	Cover Sheet
Summary (40 CFR 1502.12)	Summary
Table of Contents [40 CFR 1502.10(c)]	Table of Contents
Statement of Purpose and Need (40 CFR 1502.13)	Chapter 2
Alternatives, Including the Proposed Action (40 CFR 1502.14)	Chapter 3
Affected Environment (40 CFR 1502.15)	Chapter 4
Environmental Consequences and Mitigation Measures (40 CFR 1502.16, 1508.8)	Chapter 5
Relationship Between Short-term Uses of the Environment and the Maintenance and Enhancement of Long-term Productivity (40 CFR 1502.16)	Chapter 6
Irreversible Environmental Changes (40 CFR 1502.16)	Chapter 6
Federal Permits That Must Be Obtained (40 CFR 1502.25)	Chapter 7
List of Preparers and Their Qualifications (40 CFR 1502.17)	Chapter 8
List of Agencies, Organizations, and Persons to Whom Copies are Sent (40 CFR 1502.10)	Chapter 9
Comments and Coordination (40 CFR 1501.7)	Chapter 10
Index (40 CFR 1502.10)	Chapter 11

This document is an informational report that identifies both the benefits of the proposed project and its environmental risks. It does not recommend whether the proposed project should be constructed or which alternative should be selected as the “preferred” alternative. Instead, this EIR/EIS provides information from which Caltrans/FHWA, other government agencies, and the public can evaluate the



proposed project. Based on this information, as well as written comments from the public and government agencies, Caltrans and FHWA will select an alternative for implementation.

### **1.3 Project Decision Making**

The Draft EIR/EIS is being circulated for public review for a period of sixty (60) days. During the review period, a public hearing held in a public workshop format will be held so citizens can ask questions and provide comments. The date and time for the public hearing are identified in Section 1.8 Public Hearing.

The selection of a preferred alternative will not be made until the impacts of all alternatives, the comments on the Draft EIR/EIS, and the information from the public hearing are fully evaluated. When the review process is complete, the Project Development Team (PDT) (a group composed of multi-disciplinary Caltrans staff, FHWA, interested resource agencies, local government representatives, and other interested parties) will recommend a preferred alternative.

When a preferred alternative is selected by Caltrans and FHWA, a Final EIR/EIS will be prepared that will more precisely identify the impacts of the preferred alternative. The Final EIR/EIS will also respond to the comments received on the Draft EIR/EIS and will discuss changes to the project as a result of project comments. Caltrans and FHWA must then approve the Final EIR/EIS. Approval of the project by the California Transportation Commission (CTC) would be required since the CTC would vote funds and adopt the route for the project.

Once a decision is made about the project, even if the No-Build Alternative is selected, a Notice of Determination (NOD) and a Record of Decision (ROD) will be prepared by Caltrans and FHWA, respectively. The NOD and ROD describe the reasons why a specific alternative was chosen. Both documents will be available to the public for review.

### **1.4 Organization of the Draft EIR/EIS**

Information is presented and discussed in the following order within this Draft EIR/EIS:

**Volume 1:** The Draft EIR/EIS is in two volumes. Volume 1 is principally text and contains ten chapters preceded by a summary and ending with appendices, as follows:

- **Summary:** The summary identifies adverse impacts, areas of known controversy, and issues to be resolved.
- **Introduction:** Explains how the Draft EIR/EIS is organized and provides information for commenting on the project/document.
- **Purpose and Need for Project:** Discusses the traffic and safety issues associated with the current U.S. 101 alignment. It reviews why the project is needed and what would be accomplished by building it. Includes a history of the project's planning and scoping process.
- **Description of the Proposed Action and its Alternatives:** Describes alternatives under consideration in detail. Describes other alternatives that were considered but eliminated from further consideration.
- **Affected Environment:** Describes the overall physical, biological, cultural, and socioeconomic conditions as they currently exist in the project area. It references technical studies that were completed specifically for the project.
- **Environmental Consequences:** Provides a detailed description of the anticipated environmental impacts and the proposed mitigation measures to avoid or minimize these effects.
- **Other Statutory Requirements:** This chapter addresses any irreversible and irretrievable commitment of resources and provides a discussion of adverse impacts.
- **Permits Required for this Project:** This chapter describes the federal and state permits that would be required for the proposed project.
- **Contributors and Reviewers:** Lists the principal authors of this analysis and consultants who prepared technical studies. The list also includes individuals who provided peer review of the technical studies and the Draft EIR/EIS.
- **List of Agencies, Organizations, and Persons:** Identifies the persons and agencies that were initially sent a copy of the Draft EIR/EIS. Other persons and agencies may have received the document but may not have been on the initial distribution list.
- **Comments and Coordination:** Describes the formal and informal coordination that has taken place between Caltrans/FHWA and other governmental agencies and the public.

- **Index:** Provides page numbers to areas of interest to the reader.

**Appendices:** The appendices at the back of Volume 1 contain additional information that is referenced in the main body of the document. Some appendices contain technical information that is summarized in the Draft EIR/EIS.

**Glossary:** The EIR/EIS includes a Glossary in Appendix A that the reader is encouraged to refer to for unfamiliar terms. Readers may also want to refer to a glossary of terms at Caltrans' website: <http://www.dot.ca.gov/ser/glossary.htm>.

**Volume 2, Environmental Atlas:** To make the Draft EIR/EIS easier to use, all maps have been compiled into a separate document (tables and figures have been retained in Volume 1).

## 1.5 Nodal Analysis

To provide flexibility in selecting a preferred alternative, Caltrans staff employed an evaluation procedure this document refers to as a “nodal approach.” This approach allows a segment of one alternative to be combined with a segment of another alternative to create a “hybrid alternative.” Map 3 shows where the dividing (or nodal) point for each alternative is located. By combining segments of alternatives, there are more possibilities for choosing a preferred alternative.

To implement the nodal approach, the text and tables in this document, for the most part, display data in a manner that allows environmental impacts of each segment to be evaluated separately. For some environmental issues, however, analysis by segment was not possible or prudent. For example, analysis by segments was not employed in the demographics discussion, because a segmental analysis could result in under-representing low-income or minority communities.

When readers of this document have a preference for a combination of node segments, they should indicate this preference in their comments on the Draft EIR/EIS (Section 1.7) and identify their reasons for recommending the hybrid alternative.

## **1.6 Metric System**

Caltrans converted to the metric system of measurements, also known as the International System of Units (SI), in response to the President's 1991 Executive Order mandating all agencies using federal money to begin using the metric standard. Although the new federal transportation bill entitled "TEA 21" allows each state to choose its system of measurement units, Caltrans' metrication policy is not affected and the metric system is used throughout this Draft EIR/EIS. Equivalent measurements in U.S./English units are provided in parentheses.

## **1.7 Comments Requested**

Written comments on the Draft EIR/EIS are encouraged and should be submitted prior to the close of the 60-day review period, which ends August 9, 2001. Comments should be directed to:

Cher Daniels, Chief  
Caltrans Office of Environmental Management S-1  
2800 Gateway Oaks Dr., Suite 100  
Sacramento, CA 95833  
Attn: Nancy MacKenzie, Environmental Coordinator

## **1.8 Public Hearing**

A public hearing is scheduled for mid-July, and will be held at the City Hall in Willits, California. The hearing will be held in a public workshop format, and allows for individuals and representatives of public agencies and groups to review the project with Caltrans and FHWA staff, ask questions and submit comments. Other meetings may be scheduled as necessary.

## **1.9 Availability of Draft EIR/EIS and Technical Studies**

The Draft EIR/EIS is available for viewing at:

- Willits Library, 390 E. Commercial Street, Willits
- Willits Environmental Center, 316 South Main St., Willits
- Fort Bragg Library, 499 East Laurel Street, Fort Bragg

- Ukiah Library, 105 N. Main St., Ukiah
- Caltrans District 1, 1656 Union Street, Eureka
- Caltrans Website:  
<http://www.dot.ca.gov/dist3/departments/environmental/willits/index.htm>

A number of technical studies were used to analyze the impacts of the proposed project and its alternatives, and are summarized in this Draft EIR/EIS.

Air Quality Analysis

Community Impact Assessment

Draft Relocation Impact Report

Economic Impact Report

Energy Report

Farmland Impact Analysis

Floodplain Study (prepared by Caltrans)

Floodplain Study (prepared by U.C. Davis)

Floodplain Evaluation Report Summary

Focused Study of Streamwater Temperature and Canopy Cover

Geotechnical Report

Historic Properties Survey Report (for cultural resources)

Initial Site Assessment (for hazardous materials)

Noise Report

Natural Environmental Study and Supplemental Natural Environment Study

Traffic Report

Visual Impact Assessment

Water Quality Assessment

Technical studies are available for viewing, along with copies of the Draft EIR/EIS at:

Willits Library, 390 E. Commercial Street, Willits

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